



Bulletin



NALC President Brian L. Renfroe sees challenges for new leadership team: • crime, • staffing, • postal operations reorganization Vows to work to protect letter carriers

On Saturday, Dec. 17, on an evening that served to close the book on one era and mark the beginning of another, Fredric Rolando performed his last act as president by leading new NALC President Brian L. Renfroe and the other 27 recently elected members of the union's Executive Council through the oath of office.

"I do solemnly promise on my honor that I will faithfully execute the laws of the National Association of Letter Carriers. I will perform, to the best of my ability, the duties of the office to which I have been elected, guard all property placed in my charge and, at the expiration of my term of office, turn the same over to my successor. I will do everything in my power to promote the welfare of the National Association of Letter Carriers and its members."

Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine kicked off the evening event and served as the evening's master of ceremonies. She called on Lisa Hayden, administrator of the Mutual Benefit Association, to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" a cappella. Retired Vice President Lew Drass led the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by the Rev. Richard J. White, pastor of the St. Paul AUMP Church in Washington, DC, who led the invocation.

Representatives from dozens of NALC branches purchased tickets and attended the dinner ceremony. The crowd also contained friends, family and labor leaders who came out to support the union's Executive Council, including Mark Dimondstein, president of the American Postal Workers Union, APWU Secretary-Treasurer Liz Powell and AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler, who offered her solidarity with Renfroe and the other members of the Executive Council.

"Tonight, we welcome the next generation of leaders who will carry on the incredible work of this union. I want to congratulate the NALC's new president, Brian Renfroe," she said. "I think Brian's election says so much about where the labor movement is," she said, pointing to his relative youth and to his being from Mississippi. "When I look at where so much of the energy and opportunity are for the labor movement right now, it is with young people and it is in the South. So, what a dynamic combination."

After a pause in the ceremony to eat dinner, Secretary-Treasurer Rhine called Rolando to the podium. Before leading the Executive Council in the administration of the oath, Rolando took a moment to say goodbye before performing his last duty as NALC president.

"Tonight is certainly not about me," he noted. "One of the most important duties of someone in a leadership role is to do what? It's to find and develop those who will replace you.

"I've had the privilege and opportunity to select, mentor and/or work with the women and men who I'm going to be installing tonight. On top of that, we have such a deep bench of letter carrier staff at Headquarters and at the regional offices behind them. And that's what allows leaders to move on while maintaining the confidence that the union will remain strong and continue to grow."

He then expressed his confidence in the Renfroe-Barner Team. Both President Renfroe and Executive Vice President Paul Barner spent time as President Rolando's special executive assistants.

"Brian spent a couple of years as director of city delivery," he said. "And for the past six years, he's been an amazing executive vice president. Brian is ready to lead, and this 28-member Executive Council is ready to face and conquer the challenges we face ahead. I'm so looking forward to watching them navigate, execute and succeed."

"My sisters and brothers," he concluded. "It's been fun. It's been an honor. Stay together and stay strong. I love you."

Rolando then called forward the 10 resident national officers, three national trustee and 15 national business agents who make up the 28-member Executive Council. NALC's seven elected AFL-CIO delegates were invited to the stage as well; only AFL-CIO delegate Lloyd Doucet was unable to attend.

After administering the oath of office, Rolando excused the other officers and called Renfroe to the podium to perform his first act as NALC president. Below is his speech in its entirety.

Thank you.
Thank you, brothers and sisters.
Thanks, Fred.
Good evening, brothers and sisters.
Tonight, I have a lot of people to congratulate and to thank—after which, I want to outline some of the serious challenges facing our union and its new Executive Council. As a native of Mississippi, I feel a little like a Southern minister about to give a sermon to a congregation that's already thinking about the Sunday potluck to follow—so it's probably best not to go on too long.
Adding strength to this wisdom are a few complicating factors: this "congregation" has already eaten; it's Saturday night, not Sunday morning; we're in Washington, not Hattiesburg; and ... you're all thinking about a party with music and alcohol, not a church potluck.
So I promise to do my best to keep this speech relatively short so that we can all head over to the holiday party and celebrate together.
I'll start by offering my congratulations to all my sisters and brothers who just took the oath of office. It is a tremendous honor to be installed with each of you and to be part of the new Executive Council of our great union, the National Association of Letter Carriers.

We are a team, first and foremost. The members of the NALC have entrusted us with the leadership of something very precious, their union. I know that every one of you share my commitment to work together every day for the best interests of America's 290,000 city letter carriers, active and retired alike.

I also want to congratulate and thank the families and friends of our national officers. Union activism at any level is impossible without their love and support. The long hours, the travel, the phone calls from members at all hours of the day place a special burden on union representatives—but also on their families. We appreciate all of you for that.

I want to welcome our special guests—especially APWU President Mark Dimondstein and Secretary-Treasurer Liz Powell. It means a great deal to us that you took the time to attend our installation. Our unions have a long and proud history of cooperation and solidarity—a history that has made each of our unions stronger. We all look forward to continue our work together.

I would also like to thank AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler for being here as well. I am excited to continue strengthening our bonds of union solidarity in the years to come.

I also want to offer a special welcome to my family members that are here with me tonight—my sister, Elizabeth Bracey, and her husband, Josh, from Hattiesburg, MS. They are here representing my mom and dad, who could not be here tonight in person—though they are certainly here in spirit.

It's not just that my parents brought me into this world together—for which I am naturally grateful—but also because I probably would not have become a letter carrier if not for my father, Ken Renfroe. He started as a letter carrier three years before I was born and is a proud retired member of my branch—NALC Branch 938 in Hattiesburg, MS. (I've never asked him—but I hope my dad didn't get in trouble for giving me a ride in his Jeep when I was 2 years old!)

I grew up immersed in the issues facing letter carriers—because they affected my father and my family. I saw how hard my dad worked and how important the union was to all of us. I developed a deep appreciation of the value—and the values—of the NALC from a very early age.

When I became a letter carrier in 2004, I had the pleasure of occasionally working alongside my dad in the same station for a couple of years before he retired. I got involved in the union because I wanted to help the people I worked with every day. I'm thankful I was given the opportunity to serve as a shop steward and I'm thankful for every opportunity I've been given to serve our members since then. So on this wonderful evening, I wish to express the overwhelming sense of gratitude I feel toward my Branch, Region 8 and, most importantly, my dad and our family. Liz and Josh—thank you for being here with me tonight. Your presence makes this very special. I love you both.

I also have two huge mentors and friends I want to recognize tonight. First, of course, is Lew Drass—who led us in the Pledge of Allegiance earlier this evening. I literally cannot thank Lew enough for the many opportunities he gave me to serve NALC over the years. He recognized my potential before I did—and then helped me (over and over) to develop as an advocate, a trainer, and as a union leader. As national business agent, Lew was an endless source of creativity and innovation in his approach to representation, organizing, fundraising for our political action fund, training and advocacy—and he mentored me all along the way. As a 20-something-year-old branch president, long late-night conversations with my national business agent about our union and my future motivated me to do all I could do to help our members—and it still does to this day.

Lew's effectiveness and success led him to Washington, where he rose to the vice presidency of the NALC—and became a beloved national leader. That love was evident every time he took the stage at a rap session, a convention ... or indeed, as we saw earlier tonight, at an installation ceremony—proven by a chorus of "Lewwwwww" each time. Thank you, Lew, for all you've done for NALC and for all you've done for me. I could never repay you for everything you've taught me, but I will repay it to those you always cared about and worked so hard for—our members.

Second, I want to express my love and appreciation for the 18th president of the NALC, Fred Rolando. We've had some great presidents over the history of this union, such as Bill Dougherty and NALC's greatest president, Vince Sombrotto. Fred Rolando belongs among these greats. Over the past 14 years, Fred has led us through recessions, three rounds of bargaining and a pandemic with steadiness, intelligence and sound judgment. All at a time when the Postal Service has been forced to transform itself in the face of dramatic technological change and repeated political attacks targeting the postal monopoly, six-day delivery and affordable universal service.

Through it all, he mobilized all our union's resources to make the best possible case for letter carriers in bargaining and in interest arbitration, while leading a broad coalition of political and legislative allies to fight back and to win. He leaves office with our union stronger than ever—financially, politically and organizationally.

For me personally, Fred has been an excellent mentor. In 2013, when I worked for Fred as an executive assistant to the president, he told me, "You are going to have to do this job one day." In the nearly 10 years since that time, he's prepared me for my new responsibilities by giving me the opportunity to serve as chief spokesperson in two rounds of bargaining, work with our management counterparts at USPS Headquarters on a daily basis to help our members and oversee our organizing and political and legislative affairs activities. He has been diligent about teaching me all that he has learned over the years.

His work ethic and integrity are an inspiration to me and all the incoming members of the Executive Council. He has led by his good example and always with good humor.

In fact, his sense of humor is his secret weapon—he knows that union work is serious business, but it can also be a lot of fun. From dressing up as Rocky to our Blues Brothers act a few months back in Chicago, our members have seen Fred's humorous side. In that spirit of fun, I do have one last bone to pick with Fred. On occasion, I have heard Fred referred to as the first NALC president from the South, which seems right at first. Not one of our predecessors were from the South—most came from all great labor towns of America—New York, Detroit, Boston and Philly, as you might expect. And Fred's home branch is in Sarasota, FL. So the claim seems to be true. But Fred is not really our first president from the South. He's a Yankee, through and through—and by that, I mean, a New York Yankee. Despite being born in Queens, his adult life in Florida might have qualified him as the NALC's first Southern president. But his refusal to shed his love for the hated New York Yankees makes that claim dubious at best. So, brothers and sisters, I humbly present myself as the real first NALC president from the South—born in Mississippi, and a diehard fan of America's team, the Atlanta Braves.

[Audience boos] That did not quite work out like I planned!
In any case, brothers and sisters, Fred really did make it fun for NALC officers and staff to come to work. We will all miss him very much.

Thank you, Fred, my brother and my dear friend. I know you will always be here for us, and I am sure I will be able to rely on you for wisdom and advice as I take on my new responsibilities. And let me be the first to call you president emeritus of the NALC—I am certain that the first general resolution to be adopted by the delegates to the 2024 Boston Convention will be one to give you that well-earned title.

Challenges

Let's turn to major challenges facing our union in the months and years to come. We can begin by acknowledging that, despite our best efforts, the working conditions for letter carriers—in what we hope is post-pandemic America—are as difficult as we've seen since the creation of the Postal Service in 1970.

Over the past two rounds of collective bargaining, we've grappled with a staffing crisis that has progressively gotten worse. Massive turnover and staffing shortages, which are drivers of managerial abuse, excessive overtime, and unsafe working conditions—were huge problems even before the pandemic. COVID-19 made these problems even worse.

We've responded in two rounds of bargaining—by significantly raising CCA pay, accelerating the transition to career status, and establishing a variety of initiatives designed to improve CCA conditions and to reduce turnover. This approach has been met with limited success.

In the last several months, we've reached agreement with the Postal Service to move hundreds of installations around the country to an all-career model. This has resulted in some improved staffing in these locations. But it is not enough. We must phase out non-career employment in the city carrier craft and significantly raise starting pay to solve the staffing crisis. This is the goal we will take up in February, when our next round of bargaining begins.

But there are solutions we need even before contract talks begin. That's because a wave of crime against letter carriers has taken hold across the country. Increasingly, our members are working in fear because so many of our brothers and sisters are being attacked on American streets by violent criminals. Just a week ago Friday, we lost a member named Aundre Cross in Milwaukee, WI. Aundre was shot and killed in a robbery while delivering mail after dark. He was just 41 years old and had 18 years on the job. He is survived by his wife and four children. It's heartbreaking and appalling.

Sadly, such robberies have become commonplace around the country. At our convention in Chicago, this was a huge subject of conversation. This violence against our members is UNACCEPTABLE. IT. MUST. BE. STOPPED.

[Moment of silence for Aundre]
Let us together make a commitment as a union to do all we can to make it stop.

Why is this violence happening? There was a time not too long ago that nobody would attack a letter carrier, an employee of the federal government and a greatly admired member of every community, even those ridden with crime. That has changed. We know that crime in general rose in America during the pandemic, and that carriers have been targeted by thieves who attempt to steal our keys with the hope of stealing mail. Protecting our members is and must be our No. 1 PRIORITY.

In fact, in recent weeks we have been working with postal management, the Postal Inspection Service and the Office of Inspector General to find ways to deter crime and violence against letter carriers. We have made it crystal clear to all that are charged with protecting postal employees: We need measures to protect our members now.

Of course, as I mentioned earlier, we will seek lasting solutions to the staffing crisis when we begin work on a new National Agreement in 2023. Let me repeat what I said earlier: That means moving toward an all-career workforce and significantly raising starting pay. We will also fight to protect and improve all our members' standard of living. To achieve this goal, we will seek general wage increases and fight to preserve our cost-of-living adjustments, which has provided significant, though partial, protection against the surge in inflation we've suffered over the past two years. Another major topic in negotiations will be the Postal Service's plans to restructure its delivery operations. We recognize that the USPS is attempting to reorganize its delivery operations in response to a massive shift in the mix of mail over the past two decades—letter volume is down 50 percent and package volumes are up 300 percent over this period. And we know that our network of delivery facilities has been starved of investment. We welcome new investments, but the overall restructuring plan will only work if the NALC is part of the planning and execution of the effort. In this round of bargaining, we will demand to continue to have a seat at the table and increase our involvement to make sure we protect the interests and rights of the men and women we represent.

As in the past, preparations are well underway for bargaining. As part of that process, we are also preparing for the possibility of binding interest arbitration, should we fail to reach a negotiated settlement. In the last contract, we ended up reaching a voluntary agreement after we started an interest arbitration. No matter which way the contract talks go, I can assure you that the NALC will be ready to deploy all of its resources to achieve a fair contract for our members.

As we bargain for better wages, we will continue to focus our legislative and political agendas in support of active and retired letter carriers. The 117th Congress was a huge success for the NALC and our allies. After more than a dozen years of sustained effort, we finally got Congress to enact postal reform legislation that both repealed the crushing mandate to pre-fund retiree health benefits and made six-day delivery the permanent law of the land.

We also made significant progress on building support on other key legislation—most notably, the Social Security Fairness Act to repeal the WEP and GPO provisions that discriminate against our CSRS retirees. That bill, which will be reintroduced in the next Congress, gained the support of a bipartisan majority in the House of Representatives. The task now is to replicate that success in the U.S. Senate, a challenge we will seek to meet in the 118th Congress. At the same time, we will fight to improve future pensions by passing the Federal Retirement Fairness Act, which would allow former TEs and CCAs to buy pension credit for their non-career service.

We will also pursue new ways to strengthen the Postal Service on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue. In Congress, we will work on new ways to financially strengthen the Postal Service, such as permitting the Postal Service to better invest its hundreds of billions of dollars in CSRS and FERS pension assets. Under current law, we are forced to invest those funds in low-interest government bonds. Allowing a more-sensible-but-safe investment policy to invest in private securities would generate billions in savings for the Postal Service. That would reduce the cost of these pensions for both us and the agency. It is not a new idea, but it is one that needs to be executed with bipartisanship and precision to provide the greatest impact. At the same time, we will continue to press the Biden administration to take executive action to implement the recommendations of the Segal report, a 2012 Postal Regulatory Commission report that called on the Office of Personnel Management to accurately—and fairly—value the Postal Service's pension assets and liabilities. This would save the Postal Service billions annually. And we will urge the White House to explore initiatives by federal agencies to better use the Postal Service to achieve their missions—providing jobs and revenues to postal workers, while improving government services to America's households and businesses.

Our recent success on the legislative front has hinged on our ability to work with legislators in both parties and a broad coalition of allies to take advantage of the public's overwhelming support for the Postal Service. This ability will be central to our success in the future. The just-concluded midterm election did narrowly shift control of the House of Representatives to the Republican Party, but the outlook for bipartisan support for the Postal Service remains positive. However, as we've seen in the past, a divided Congress often leads to budget fights that threaten the health benefits and pensions of federal workers. We must—and we will—fight any misguided efforts to target federal and postal employees and retirees for unfair cuts. Another source of our success has been the strength of our political organizing and fundraising for the Letter Carrier Political Fund. The money we raise to support pro-letter carrier candidates in both parties—and to finance extensive get-out-the-vote efforts with our allies in the AFL-CIO—is essential to making our voices heard in Washington. In the recently concluded midterm election, we supported hundreds of candidates from both parties who showed support for our issues. Amazingly, 95 percent of the candidates we supported won their races—including 84 percent of the challengers.

In the years ahead, we aim to build on the recent success of LCPF. We will aggressively work to educate all NALC members on the importance of contributing to the PAC. I know our members always do the right thing, and I'm convinced that we have an opportunity to rapidly grow LCPF through education. This will allow us to amplify and expand our influence on debates that affect the wages, benefits and working conditions of letter carriers, as well as the health of the Postal Service.

It will also allow us to fight for other important legislation, including the PRO Act and other labor law reforms, as well as the John Lewis Voting Rights Act to expand vote-by-mail and strengthen American democracy. Both these bills are essential to improve the ability of unions to grow and to raise living standards for all workers across America. They are also essential for the pursuit of economic and racial justice.

We will complement our pro-labor efforts in Congress with continued engagement, cooperation and solidarity actions with the broader labor movement. Of course, this starts with the other U.S. postal unions but also involves working with our allies in both our domestic and international federations—the AFL-CIO and UNI Post & Logistics. These bodies provide platforms to improve labor conditions universally. For example, NALC works with both federations to help workers employed by Amazon to organize, both nationally and internationally. We cannot, and must not, let Amazon's delivery operations set the labor market standards for our industry. Its non-union—and therefore powerless and low-paid—delivery workforce is a threat to every NALC member.

Another priority I want to highlight for the coming years is to build on the progress we have made in expanding the networks of NALC representation available to city letter carriers. These networks—which include regional workers' compensation assistants, regional grievance assistants, legislative and political organizers and, most recently, full-time advocates—are among President Rolando's greatest achievements. My administration will grow and strengthen these networks. We will embrace new technology to give our representatives the tools they need to better serve our members—and to educate our members about all the ways that NALC can help improve their working lives. We will also use technology to develop online learning and training programs to supplement our extensive in-person training capacity. Robust training is the key to arming all NALC representatives with the knowledge and skills needed to best represent our members. We are committed to using all available tools to provide that education to those that have stepped up to represent letter carriers.

Expanding and improving the representation we give is the best way to maintain—and perhaps even improve on—our organizing success. Ninety-three percent of all active city letters are members of the NALC—and we intend to remain the best organized open-shop union in America!

A final priority I want to mention for the years to come is our continued commitment to defend the Postal Service itself—as a public service with affordable service for Americans, no matter where they live and how much money they have. We've always embraced a dual mandate—to fight for our members and for the public interest in a public post office. NALC and the other postal unions have been battling for decades against privatization and deregulation with great success. We will continue to do that in the future. In a few short years, we'll mark the 250th anniversary of the U.S. Post Office. We will celebrate:

- Ben Franklin's Post Office that delivered the Federalist Papers that helped create the U.S. Constitution;
Montgomery Blair's Post Office that created city delivery in 1863 and helped reelect Abraham Lincoln in 1864 with an innovation called absentee voting—one that allowed hundreds of thousands of union soldiers to vote from the battlefields of the Civil War;
John Wanamaker's Post Office that helped create a continental market economy with the invention of Parcel Post and mail-order catalogs;
Louis DeJoy's Postal Service that helped America survive the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 by delivering essential goods to every American household and facilitating the highest-turnout election since 1900, thanks to vote-by-mail.

No matter who leads the Postal Service, no matter how visionary or how misguided they may be, NALC will be there to defend this great American institution. We will do that not only because it's in our members' best interests, but also because it supports the common good for all Americans.

Closing

I started my speech with a note of gratitude. Let me finish on a similar note by thanking the most important people in our union—the members we represent. They have been the key to our success for 133 years. There is no more powerful force in America than empowered solidarity. We have the force of empowered solidarity in the NALC, thanks to the unity and commitment of our 290,000 members. For that I am eternally grateful.

I am also tremendously thankful for the NALC—our union. In many ways, it has given my life meaning and purpose—as I am sure it has done for all of you.

Every day, NALC makes it possible to go to work and fight for the dignity and rights of our members who deliver the mail—and for the dignity and security of the hard-earned benefits of our retired members who served this country so well, even as they built and improved a powerful union.

Every day, NALC gives us a platform to fight for racial and economic justice in the workplace, not just for letter carriers, but for all postal workers and all other workers here and abroad.

Every day, NALC gives us the capacity to join forces to protect one of America's greatest institutions—the United States Postal Service—a part of the social fabric in every American community and an indispensable element of our economy and our democracy.

And every day, NALC makes it possible for men and women of every race and ethnicity from every corner of a gigantic country to embrace the power of solidarity and to fight for each other and for the common good.

For all these reasons, and many, many more, I am extremely proud and honored to be the 19th president of the National Association of Letter Carriers! Thank you very much!



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